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Wednesday, May 23, 2018

Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I am calling to order meeting number 104 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are having a briefing on the status of the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board's recommendations.

With us as witnesses today we have the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board representatives, Kathleen Fox, Chair; Jean Laporte, Chief Operating Officer; and Natacha Van Themsche, Director of Air Investigations.

Welcome to you all. I apologize in advance for the fact that, with the permission of the committee, we will continue for another 10 minutes or so, and then we will have to suspend and go to vote.

Our apologies, but we'd like to get your testimony on the record if we can, and be able to go into questions when we come back.

Ms. Fox, I turn it over to you.

Ms. Kathleen Fox (Chair, Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board): Good afternoon.

Madam Chair, honourable members, thank you for inviting the Transportation Safety Board of Canada to appear today, to discuss progress on the implementation of TSB safety recommendations.

About one year ago, we appeared before this committee to discuss aviation safety. In the context of that discussion, we told you that the response to about three-quarters of all TSB recommendations issued since our creation in 1990 had received our highest rating, that of fully satisfactory.

However, we also noted that many of our recommendations directed to Transport Canada had been active for more than 10 or 20 years. In fact, the board was so concerned with the protracted delays and slow progress that it decided to make this a watch-list issue in October 2016.

Where do we stand in 2018? The board has recently completed its annual reassessment of active recommendations, and I am pleased to report that the responses to 79.6% of all recommendations are now rated as fully satisfactory, an increase of 3.3% compared with April 2017. This year, we've closed an additional 28 recommendations, 26 of them being fully satisfactory. The document we've tabled shows the full picture of the assessments at the end of March 2018.

Over the past year, concerted efforts were made to reach out to Transport Canada in the three modes and work with them in a collaborative manner to review all the old recommendations. All the old rail recommendations and the majority of the old marine recommendations were reviewed. A joint action plan was established with Transport Canada for the review of the old aviation recommendations. Unfortunately, TC did not meet the agreed-upon timelines, and in many cases provided inadequate updates to enable the TSB to conduct proper reassessments.

Nevertheless, the TSB conducted its own research and was able to put together sufficient information to enable the board to assess the residual risk and update the reassessment of 28 aviation recommendations. In 23 of these cases, the recommendations were reassessed as fully satisfactory. The board is quite pleased with this progress.

However, it has taken much too long to address most of these issues. For example, in 1995 the TSB called upon Transport Canada to establish guidelines for training on crew resource management and pilot decision-making. TC finally published new standards on these topics in July 2017, and these standards will come into effect in January 2019. That's about 23 years to resolve the safety issues.

[*Translation*]

In total, 24 recommendations, 21 on aviation safety and three on marine safety, have not yet been reassessed due to the late receipt of the updated responses from Transport Canada. These recommendations will be reassessed in the coming months. We hope that a few more can be closed.

● (1535)

[*English*]

As of April 1, 2018, we have a total of 79 active recommendations in the air, marine, and rail modes. A little less than half, 33 of these recommendations, are over 10 years old. This compares with 52 in April 2017. Progress has been made, but the tougher and more difficult issues are the ones that remain unresolved. Furthermore, no action has been taken to improve the process to ensure that new recommendations can be addressed in a timely manner in the future.

Let me give you a few examples of the outstanding issues.

In aviation, we have three recommendations pertaining to flight data recorders and cockpit voice recorders that would bring Canada in line with international standards. These recommendations date back to 1994 and 1999.

[*Translation*]

Similarly, we have five outstanding recommendations pertaining to seaplanes dating back to 1993 and 1994. In marine, we have six outstanding recommendations pertaining to fishing vessel safety that range between 14 and 25 years old.

In rail, we have a 17-year-old recommendation on following signal indications and a 14-year-old recommendation on voice recorders.

Although progress was made during the past year, the board remains concerned about the limited engagement by Transport Canada on addressing all the old recommendations and the lack of action by the government on the identification of a systemic solution to improve the process for the future.

[*English*]

As stated previously, action is required on three fronts in order to address the watch-list issue of slow response on addressing TSB recommendations.

First, Transport Canada must make a clear commitment to take action on the outstanding TSB recommendations with which it agrees. Second, the Government of Canada must improve and accelerate the process for taking action on safety-related recommendations. Third, there must be a marked reduction in the backlog of outstanding TSB recommendations, particularly those that will bring Canada back in line with international standards.

Thank you. We are prepared to answer any questions you may have and to provide specific examples of outstanding recommendations where not enough has been done.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Fox.

For questions, we will try four minutes each so everybody gets an opportunity.

Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you for being with us today.

I have a question with regard to general aviation and the use of ELTs. Right now, ELTs are used within small aircraft. They have a false alarm rate of about 90%, and under the current technology they only work about 64% of the time. We're talking about when a small aircraft crashes and then a signal is sent in order for that aircraft to then be found. There has been a number of incidents throughout the years when a plane has crashed and the ELT actually hasn't gone off. Most predominantly, I'm talking about an ELT 406. Of course the plane cannot be found, which means the individuals—you know they have crashed, they most likely have died upon impact, though not necessarily, and in some cases the bodies are actually never found. For example, there is a family in my riding of Lethbridge, Alberta, who lost a son and his girlfriend just last June in B.C. The aircraft went down within a forested area, it is suspected. The ELT never went off, so to this day the plane has never been found. It's almost a year later.

Now, this could be prevented, it is my understanding, if there were a GPS transmitter put within the plane as well, so that it would be both an emergency beacon that would go off if the plane crashed as well as a GPS transponder, which would send a trail of breadcrumbs, if you will, to a radio transmitter on the ground. Then there would be a record of where the plane has been every few minutes.

Is this a technology that Canada would look at, or do we feel that ELTs are doing the job they need to do in order to keep private pilots safe?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: First of all, the issue of ELTs and crashworthiness and the capture of the emitting signal has been the subject of seven TSB recommendations following the crash of an air medical helicopter out of Moosonee, Ontario, that occurred back in 2013. Those seven recommendations—some of which are addressed to Transport Canada and some addressed to the other government regulators and the industry—touch on things like crashworthiness, the first burst response so that the signal gets captured by the satellite and so on. We can provide more information if the committee would like.

These seven recommendations are currently ongoing with Transport Canada. The other technology that you referenced is a technology that is called a SPOT tracker. There are various models. That can provide a signal to people on the ground who are following that aircraft, but it hasn't necessarily met the crashworthiness standards of an ELT. It would be up to Transport Canada to work with other regulators to determine if it could meet the requirements in lieu of an ELT. For now, we've made recommendations specific to improving the robustness, the crashworthiness, and the ability to signal the ELTs.

● (1540)

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, you have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

In my constituency of Alfred-Pellan, in Laval, a number of residents have complained about the increasing noise from aircraft. They have actually launched a petition about it. In Montreal, the Superior Court of Québec has approved a class action by the residents to challenge the sound nuisance.

Can this increase in the sound nuisance caused by planes perhaps be linked to the low altitude at which the aircraft fly?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: I am sorry, but I did not understand the first part of your question. You were talking about nuisance and about noise—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I was talking about the increasing noise from aircraft.

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Okay. The noise issue is not really a safety issue. It is more the responsibility of Transport Canada than of the Transportation Safety Board.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Concerning vessel length on the east coast, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans tries to limit the catch by fishers by limiting the length of their vessels. This leads to all kinds of very strange modifications whereby they try to cut off the nose and extend the back and do all sorts of things to get more crab traps on these vessels, but there's always the risk that they'll render those vessels unstable because of these modifications.

Is this an issue that your group has studied at all and investigated?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Yes, we have. In 2012 the TSB issued a safety issues investigation into fishing safety. We examined 10 issues relating to the safety of fishermen. One of them was fisheries resource management measures, such as limiting the length of vessels for certain types of fisheries, which has prompted the kind of behaviour that you mention. This is something on which we have recommendations outstanding and which we're continuing to follow, both through our outstanding recommendations and also through our watch-list.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Could I ask that those recommendations be sent to the chair of the fisheries and oceans committee, please?

Mr. Jean Laporte (Chief Operating Officer, Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board): Yes, we can send them; however, we've appeared before the fisheries and oceans committee just recently to discuss exactly that topic. We have thus already provided some information, but we will send it again.

The Chair: Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

According to the TSB, about 50 or so recommendations have been in place for more than 10 years—correct me if my figures are not quite right—and about 75% of those deal with aviation. You have proposed three measures to remedy the situation. The first is that "Transport Canada must make a clear commitment to take action on the outstanding TSB recommendations with which it agrees."

I confess that I am a little taken aback. I had imagined that recommendations have not been implemented because Transport Canada disagreed.

Would you have some examples of a measure where Transport Canada is dragging its feet, though the department says it agrees with your proposals, and nothing is being done?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: In my comments, I talked about flight data recorders and voice recorders. Canada is not yet meeting the international standards for these systems. Our recommendations actually go back to 1991, 1994 and 1999. Transport Canada told us that it would pass regulations to comply with what we were asking and also with the international standards. However, that has not yet come to fruition. Soon, maybe, but it is not done yet.

That is one example.

● (1545)

Mr. Robert Aubin: You have exhausted all the means of exerting pressure that you can put on Transport Canada in order to get your recommendation in place.

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Actually, in October 2016, with our Watchlist, we found a way to diminish the problem of Transport Canada's slowness in responding to some of our recommendations. Since then, we have noticed a lot of progress, but there is still work to be done.

Mr. Robert Aubin: My next question is on a related subject. If you compare—as I tend to do—the budgets in 2015, 2016 and 2017, Transport Canada has reduced the budget for training railway safety inspectors by 17%. The latest statistics from your office indicate that the rail accident rate has increased by 21% in the same period.

In your opinion, is there a cause-and-effect relationship between the budget cuts at Transport Canada and the increasing number of accidents?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: I do not think that you can make that kind of correlation. The causes of the accidents are very complex. You have to consider each of the events to determine its cause. To date, we have established no correlation between those accidents and Transport Canada's staffing levels for rail.

Mr. Robert Aubin: My question was mostly about inspections.

The TSB studies situations once accidents have happened, fine. But if you reduce the budget for inspections that can prevent accidents, is there not an inconsistency?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: We issued comments on Transport Canada's oversight in connection with the accident at Lac Mégantic. We provided evidence to show that there were shortcomings. Since then, Transport Canada has made a lot of progress in overseeing rail safety.

Mr. Robert Aubin: However, the first problem we see—

[*English*]

The Chair: It will have to be very, very short.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Actually I wanted to find out your opinion on the main problem, which is common to rail transport and aviation: operator or pilot fatigue.

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Fatigue is a risk for any kind of transportation. That risk must be managed by the companies and must be subject to regulation.

Currently, Transport Canada establishes the regulations in that regard, but we will not comment on the regulations they propose.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

It's three minutes to the vote. I suggest we suspend now.

If everyone could come back as soon as the vote is over, we can resume the discussion.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1600)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order. I apologize for the interruption.

We'll go to Mr. Hardie for four minutes.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We already canvassed the vessel length issue. One thing I noticed here was the issue of unstable approaches. In some of our earlier studies and in testimony that we heard, there appeared to be, and perhaps you can confirm this, some question as to the hand-off between the automated systems and the manual systems in approaches. Perhaps that hand-off wasn't as skilled as it needed to be, or it happened too early or too late.

Was that an observation that you developed after studying some of the unstable approach issues?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: I would say in answer to this that the issue is unstable approaches—the approach is too high or too low, too fast or too slow—that are continued to a landing, because there is a higher risk of accident. They may arise for a variety of reasons. The hand-off between, for example, releasing the autopilot and flying manually may have had an effect in some, but it's not something that jumps out at me as a recurring causal factor.

Mr. Ken Hardie: As somebody who flies fairly often, I had a chat with an airline pilot about this. I noticed that quite often as they begin their descent, they basically almost entirely cut the power to the motors, and they let the plane glide for a long period of time. Then you can hear the engine start up again on the final approach. Is that a practice that you're familiar with?

• (1605)

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Each operator and each type of aircraft has its own standard operating procedures that they are required to follow. Again, it would be important that the crew maintain the flight profile with whatever combination of power or airspeed that they need in order to maintain that flight profile. It's not something that I can say is recurring.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Fatigue management is certainly a top-of-mind issue as we look at new regulations to deal with that, and the whole matter of the fatigue management system, and more generally, the safety management systems. Again, looking back at your analysis of past incidents, what can you say about the state of those processes? Are they being, for the most part, properly managed, or do you see some difficulties in relying on the companies to basically manage safety themselves?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Perhaps I'll start with safety management. Safety management is an issue that is on our watch-list and has been for a number of years now. We would like to see that all aviation companies, all commercial aviation operators, be required to have that. It's the same for marine operators, that they be required to demonstrate that they're effectively managing safety. In a number of our investigations, we've identified weaknesses in the way operators manage safety and also in the way Transport Canada oversees how they're doing that. That is definitely an issue that's high up on our radar.

With respect to fatigue management plans, the railway industry is required to have certain plans and to submit them to Transport Canada. Fatigue is a risk that has to be managed, so it should be managed as a hazard under a company's safety management system. But many companies aren't required to have them. Some companies comply with the regulations but don't go beyond that. We believe that safety needs to be managed, fatigue needs to be managed, and therefore, they should have those kinds of plans.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have to go down a bit deeper with respect to some of your comments in your opening remarks, specifically, the commitment to take action to accelerate the backlog. Would you be a bit more specific in regard to what you're actually referring to?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: In 2016, when we released our updated watch-list, we identified that there were 52 recommendations directed to Transport Canada in all modes—air, rail, and marine—that were more than 10 years old. Thirty-nine of them were more than 20 years old. We wanted to see a concerted action on the part of Transport to reduce that number. As of the end of March, the 52 recommendations have been reduced to 33, so there has been progress made.

However, we still have a backlog, particularly on the aviation side, of outstanding recommendations, where we either haven't had a response or we've just had a response recently that we still need to reassess. Transport Canada, working with Madame Van Themsche, had developed a plan to triage the outstanding recommendations and provide them to us in certain bunches, at certain times, and they didn't meet their timelines. That's one of the reasons we still have a number of outstanding recommendations.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Concerning the on-board video and voice recorders, can you give some more comment on the direction you're taking?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: When you talk about on-board voice and video, are you talking about locomotives?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Yes.

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Bill C-49 contained provisions with respect to the mandatory installation of locomotive voice and videos in all leading locomotive cabs on main track. That has recently passed. We're very pleased that finally, after many years of calling for voice and video recorders, they will be installed in lead locomotives on main track.

That being said, there's still a lot of work to be done. The regulations have to be developed that enshrine the balance between privacy and safety. We also have to examine our business processes in terms of sharing that data going forward.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Do you have any comment on what direction should be taken with respect to establishing those regulations?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: The regulations will be established under Transport Canada's purview, but we will be collaborating with them to make sure that those regulations protect the information so that it's only used for the purposes permitted under the legislation and that privacy is protected. These are, however, Transport Canada's regulations.

● (1610)

Mr. Vance Badawey: My last question is with respect to multimodal safety management oversight, and when I say multimodal, I mean different users.

Can you give some comment on the transportation companies overall with respect to managing their safety risks effectively or not effectively? Can you give some comment on where we are in that regard?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Each mode is a bit different in terms of the requirements.

If we look at the major companies—the major railway companies and the major air companies—by and large, they have the proper infrastructure and support. They have fairly mature safety management systems, which their regulator oversees to ensure that they're compliant with the regulations and also effective at doing what they're doing.

The issue for us is often with the smaller operators on the railway side, on the marine side, and in the air. In the air and marine modes, they're not required to have safety management systems. Many of them may thus take the approach of just minimal compliance with regulations, which isn't in and of itself enough to effectively manage the risks in their operations.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I want to follow up on my questions concerning ELTs. Are you okay with the fact that ELTs work properly only 36% of the time? Is the safety board okay with that?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: First of all, I don't have those statistics. I'm not sure where those statistics came from.

What we know is that there have been a number of accidents in which the emergency locator did not transmit a signal, not because the ELT failed but because the antenna to which it was attached broke during the accident sequence and, therefore, wasn't able to get a signal out.

No, we're not okay with that. That is why, following the accident involving the Ornge air medical helicopter out of Moosonee, the TSB made seven recommendations, of which, if I recall, four were made to Transport Canada and three to other regulators, to improve the crashworthiness of ELTs, including not just the ELT itself but the antenna system.

Right now, with an ELT there's a gap of 50 seconds before the first signal is sent out and captured by search and rescue. This means that if the antenna is broken during that period, the signal isn't captured. We recommended that this be reviewed and reduced. We've made a number of recommendations to improve the crashworthiness of ELTs, but they are still ongoing.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I understand that this is with ELTs. With all due respect, an ELT is a rather primitive technology. We have much better now.

For example, in the United States, they're starting to move over now to using ADS-B, which of course is a GPS transponder. There's no reason that this device, the GPS transponder, couldn't also have an emergency beacon within it, becoming a device that does both.

Should Canada not be looking to be innovative and use technology that is of the modern day and age in order to make sure we're looking after the safety of our pilots?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: It would perhaps be better to address that question to Transport Canada as the regulator of these systems. There are multiple countries involved. For now, ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization, is continuing to support the use of ELTs.

That being said, absolutely there is new technology on the horizon, but the question is, as that technology may initially be restricted to large aircraft that can afford it, how do we preserve the ability to capture the small aircraft, which may not be able to afford this kind of technology for years to come? In fact, some older aircraft may not even be able to be equipped with it.

Ms. Rachael Harder: In your estimation then, is an ELT, in fact, the best safety device that can be on board a private aircraft?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: It has its limitations but the fact is that if an airplane goes down in a remote area, somebody needs to know that, so the ELT is what we have. There are other technologies, such as SPOT trackers and other devices—I don't want to use model names—that some people have purchased, and that can provide advice in the event of an aircraft accident, but they don't necessarily meet the crashworthiness standard, so there's an issue there, and not everybody has them.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay, but if a GPS device could be created that would make it through a crash intact, would that not be the preferred method to an ELT?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Again, I don't want to say yes, and I don't want to say no. There are many complex issues associated with it. I think it's up to the regulators involved and the industry to work to develop the most effective solution to make sure that if an aircraft goes down, it can be found.

● (1615)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have four minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Perfect.

I'd like to focus on the issue of the loss of life on fishing vessels, and in particular, the availability and use of equipment to save lives. Are there specific pieces of equipment that are not widely available or being used that we should be focusing our attention on?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: There are two pieces of equipment in particular that the TSB has made recommendations on that are still outstanding and that we continue to push for. One is that all fishermen should be wearing PFDs when they're on board a vessel because either the vessel can capsize, or the person can end up in the water for other reasons, but they have a much greater chance of survival if they're wearing a PFD. The TSB has made recommendations to Transport Canada in that regard, as well as to the provinces from a workplace health and safety perspective.

The other issue has to do with emergency position indicating radio beacons—EPIRBs—which, again, are a type of ELT, but for vessels, which will float free of a vessel that capsizes and send a signal to the satellite or to search and rescue so that the vessel and those people can be located.

Those are two types of equipment that we've recommended that are still not fully required in the fishing industry.

Mr. Sean Fraser: With respect to the EPIRBs, right now, is there any issue regarding the actual availability in the marketplace to get these on, or is it just that there isn't a regulatory regime that mandates their use?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: I'm sorry, I don't have the details at my fingertips, but we can certainly make those available to you in terms of which types of vessels require them. There are requirements.... Equipment availability is not an issue. It's about which categories of vessels are required to carry them versus those that aren't, and we believe a wider variety of vessels should be required to carry them.

Mr. Sean Fraser: With respect to the magnitude of the issue of fatalities that are actually taking place on fishing vessels, are there certain kinds of vessels that are higher-risk?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: We'd have to look at the stats for that. Fishing vessels are certainly on our watch-list because of the proportionately high number of fatalities in that industry.

Mr. Sean Fraser: It's fine if we don't have all the information today.

One area I didn't specifically see is the conflict between fishing vessels when they run into, essentially, a personal dispute over territory, and who should be able to fish what area, which can sometimes lead to violence. Is this an issue the TSB is watching at all?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: No, that would be more of a potentially criminal issue, or a civil issue, so that's not an issue we would look at.

Mr. Sean Fraser: One of the issues you flagged was regulatory oversight. Was it just a factor of not having sufficient resources directed to the folks who are supposed to be enforcing the rules that do exist?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: We've seen in a number of investigations—I can quote Lac-Mégantic as an example of the rail and I can quote Ornge as an example of the air—where Transport Canada oversight has been ineffective. Either they didn't identify unsafe operating practices, or they did identify them but were unable to bring the company back into compliance before an accident occurred.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Specific to the loss of life on fishing vessels, I noticed regulatory oversight was flagged by TSB. Are there specific examples you can point to where this has been an issue?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: The issue there is that not all small vessels are inspected by Transport Canada. They're required to comply with certain standards and regulations, but they're not necessarily inspected. There is a small vessel—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Is there an inspector shortage?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: I can't attribute it to volume. It's more that there is no requirement for Transport Canada to conduct those inspections.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm sure that's my minute.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, on to Mr. Liepert.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Thank you, Chair. Thank you for being here.

I have a couple of quick questions related to the unfortunate crash about a year ago now, involving the former colleague of many folks around here, Mr. Prentice. I also personally knew one of the other individuals on the aircraft.

My recollection is that your organization did a review of that and was a little critical of Transport Canada for not initiating some of the work and the actions that needed to be addressed, and which might have prevented that particular crash. Could you expand on that?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Following that accident, first of all, we were unable to reconstruct the sequence of events because the aircraft was not equipped with recorders. We issued a new recommendation calling on the mandatory installation of lightweight flight recorders for commercial aircraft and business aircraft—that aircraft was being operated as a business aircraft—that aren't currently required to carry them. The minister has 90 days to respond to us since we released that, so we'll await the response.

The second thing we pointed out is that the operator of that aircraft had not been inspected since 2008 by Transport Canada, so Transport was not aware that the pilot was not qualified to carry passengers at night that night. He wasn't current. He hadn't done the takeoffs and landings required.

Third, that company did not have operational approval to operate as a single-pilot operation, which they were doing that night.

Fourth, there was a maintenance issue relating to non-compliance with an airworthiness directive, which might have been picked up in a Transport Canada inspection.

We issued a concern that Transport Canada needed to be more proactive in terms of going out and overseeing the business aircraft community and in terms of planned inspections as well, not just reacting to incidents and accidents or other reports to go out and inspect them.

● (1620)

Mr. Ron Liepert: It was a little late at that stage.

How onerous would that be? Would it require a number of additional staff? I have no idea how many of these particular planes would fall into that category.

Ms. Kathleen Fox: There are something in the neighbourhood of 650 to 700 corporate operators in Canada. Undoubtedly, it would require some resources to go out and inspect that. Transport Canada had advised us or we had learned that they had temporarily suspended planned surveillance of that sector of the aviation industry in the summer of 2016, a couple of months before that accident—not to say that the two are related. They have now told us they are reinstituting in 2018 an action to do planned surveillance in that sector.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'm done. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Aubin, you have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Fox, I want to go back to railway transport, because you mentioned that the transportation of flammable liquids by rail would remain on the watch list until all the old DOT-111s are replaced by more robust tank cars.

Can you tell us right now that the newly designed TC-117 tank cars are safe as replacements? Or will we have to wait for disaster to strike to know for sure?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: We still don't have enough data on accidents and incidents to determine whether these tank cars comply with the standards. We know that the standards are a lot higher than before. We assume, and hope, that this new technology will perform better, should an accident occur. To date, we don't have lot of data on which to base an opinion.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Is the design of these new cars the solution to problems you've seen in previous accidents?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Yes.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I have another question, on aviation safety this time.

We often talk about pilot fatigue. It seems there is not enough evidence available to describe, define and quantify this issue.

Which data should we be gathering to evaluate how important a factor aircraft pilot fatigue is in accidents?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: No matter the mode of transportation, we always investigate to see whether fatigue has played a role in accidents and incidents. We look at when the accidents occur: during the day, or at night. We look at the number of work hours people put in right before accidents and incidents occur. We look at how many hours of sleep they had, not only in the 24 hours leading up to the accidents, but up to 72 hours before, and even further back. We always look to find out whether fatigue has played a role in accidents and incidents. If so, we include this in our findings.

Since 2000, fatigue has played a role in approximately 20 air transportation accidents we've investigated, 15 of which involved crew members, the pilots. A number of these accidents involved private aircraft. We have investigated five or six cases involving commercial airline pilots.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Should Transport Canada be proactive in collecting data on pilots' schedules to get an idea of what's behind the accidents you've looked into? Should it review its regulations accordingly?

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Transport Canada has already prepared regulatory proposals. The system has its rules, but this will change as the new regulations are implemented. These regulations set a limit on pilots' in-flight hours and on-duty hours. It's up to the companies to keep records, subject to inspection by Transport Canada, to prove that they comply with the regulations and that they can manage pilot fatigue.

● (1625)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Do you believe that—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Monsieur Aubin, but this brings us to a close.

Thank you very much to our witnesses. We will move on.

Thank you for the information. I am sure if the committee has additional questions, we can send them off to you, Ms. Fox. I'm sure you'll be glad to answer them.

Ms. Kathleen Fox: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly.

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

For the committee members, I have a question to ask before we go into our next portion. You all received an email regarding some information on our ocean war graves report. If there are no objections, the analysts will include that as an appendix to our report.

Is everybody okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We will suspend momentarily until the minister and his staff come in.

● (Pause)

● (1630)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), this is on the main estimates for 2018-19: vote 1, under Canadian Air Transport Security Authority; vote 1, under Canadian Transportation Agency; votes 1, 5, 10, 15, and 20, under Department of Transport; vote 1, under Marine Atlantic Inc.; votes 1, 5, and 10, under Office of Infrastructure of Canada; vote 1, under the Federal Bridge Corporation Limited; vote 1, under the Jacques-Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc.; vote 1, under VIA Rail Canada Inc.; and vote 1, under Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority, referred to the committee on Monday, April 16.

Minister Sohi, welcome.

We welcome you here today with your officials. We are trying to move it along fast because of the timing. We have a vote that won't be too long.

For your opening remarks, Minister Sohi, please go ahead.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): Thank you so much for having me. I'm always honoured to be here with my staff.

I have the privilege of updating you on Infrastructure Canada's main estimates for 2018-19. Specifically, the department is requesting $6.15 billion to support the continued delivery of our long-term plan. This funding will ensure that communities across Canada have the money they need when they need it.

I also want to outline the significant progress our government has made to give all Canadians an even better place to call home and the brighter future they deserve. My honourable colleagues, the population of Canada is growing, and that means our communities must keep up with the demand for better ways to connect Canadians with each other. We also need faster, more efficient ways for Canadians to move the goods and services they produce to all parts of Canada and beyond. That is how our country will continue to grow and prosper and that's why, in every corner of this country, you see ground being broken, tunnels being dug, water treatment plants being upgraded, roads and bridges being improved, new buses and trains being rolled out, and 2018 is shaping up to be another busy construction season.

We are investing more than $180 billion under the investing in Canada plan. Together with our partners, we are making significant progress in implementing a plan that responds to their needs. That is because provinces, territories, municipalities, and indigenous communities own 98% of the public infrastructure in Canada.

I am proud to say that the first phase of our government's investing in Canada plan is making a real difference in the everyday lives of Canadians. It is already creating new opportunities for Canadians across the country to do business, trade, learn, and innovate, and is supporting thousands of jobs for the middle class and those working hard to join it.

Since the start of the government's mandate in November 2015, nearly 600,000 new jobs have been added to the economy. The results did not happen by chance. We have enacted a comprehensive plan for the economy, through measures such as middle-class tax cuts, the Canada child benefit, and investing in infrastructure. These infrastructure investments are supporting thousands of new jobs in—

The Chair: Can I interrupt, just for a half-second? I need unanimous consent from the committee to continue on while the bells are ringing.

Do I have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Please continue.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: We have enacted a comprehensive plan for the economy through measures such as middle-class tax cuts, the Canada child benefit, and investments in infrastructure. These infrastructure investments are supporting thousands of new jobs in construction, manufacturing, transportation, engineering, and professional services.

In the Montreal area, the construction of the new Champlain Bridge is creating thousands of jobs. In December, when it is scheduled to be open to traffic, the bridge will make it easier for Montrealers who travel back and forth from the south shore. Likewise, the Gordie Howe international bridge will provide an additional crossing at one of the busiest points of the Canada-U.S. border, and the expansion of this critical trade route will improve connection between Windsor and Detroit.

Let me dig into how this plan has already delivered concrete results for Canadians after only two years. I'm proud to report that more than 20,000 projects are either in progress or already completed. These investments are improving public transit systems. In British Columbia, faster, more frequent bus service is being rolled out to all metro Vancouver communities. More than 500 bus drivers are being hired in the largest recruitment drive since the 2010 Olympics.

Our government's investment is also improving water treatment plants across the country. This means cleaner and safer drinking water for more Canadians, regardless of where they live.

Our investments are expanding the number of affordable rental housing units while renewing the existing stock. That means more Canadian families will have access to a safe and affordable place to call home and indigenous communities will have access to better housing.

Through the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, which we just launched last week, our investment will better protect communities from the potential impacts of a changing climate. That means fewer communities will have their lives disrupted by extreme events such as flooding and fires.

Through the smart cities challenge, we're encouraging communities to use data and connected technologies to improve the quality of life for all Canadians. For the first round, we received 130 applications representing communities from every province and territory.

I also want to take this opportunity to reiterate our progress on bilateral agreements and why they are so important. Stable and predictable funding is what allows our partners to better manage the existing assets while planning for new infrastructure projects. To date, I have signed eight bilateral agreements, and we're working hard to finalize the remaining five.

One of the projects these agreements are funding is Calgary's green line LRT route. This new line is expected to support an estimated 20,000 jobs during the design and construction phase, and an additional 400 long-term jobs will support its operation and maintenance when the new line is up and running. Once in service, the green line will provide transit riders in the city's north and southeast communities with a direct route to the downtown core. It will also improve connections to hospitals, employment centres, and community centres.

In Edmonton, improvements to the busy railway crossing at 50 Street and the CP rail will reduce congestion and travel time for drivers. It will also give businesses in the area a more efficient way to move their products around Edmonton. During the construction phase, this project is expected to create 900 well-paying jobs.

My colleagues, the investments I have outlined today are already paying dividends for Canadians, and they will continue to do so for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you, and I'm happy to take questions.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Sohi.

We'll go to Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have four minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, in an interview with CTV's *Question Period* this weekend, you said that negotiations with Kinder Morgan on indemnification are happening in private because your government is "protecting the public interest". Later in that same interview, when asked how much indemnification will cost Canadian taxpayers, you said, remarkably, that Canadians will know once those discussions are concluded and that it will be an open, transparent discussion about what indemnification government will provide to Kinder Morgan.

Seriously, how can Canadians possibly have an open and transparent discussion around indemnification when your government already agreed upon the terms with Kinder Morgan behind closed doors?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: The reason that we have given approval to the Trans Mountain expansion is that it is going to create thousands of jobs for Canadians, as well as take our natural resources to international markets. That has been a challenge for decades, and particularly the last decade where we have not seen a single pipeline built for international markets.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, you have eight days left.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: This will allow us to expand our market. It will allow us to get better pricing for Alberta oil. That's the reason why we're building it—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, I only have four minutes.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: —and we will continue to advance this project.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, you are the only Albertan around the cabinet table, yet we have seen no progress since Kinder Morgan made their announcement of May 31 as a deadline. What are you doing personally to fight for this project?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I can assure the honourable colleague, this committee and Canadians, and particularly Albertans, that our government is committed to getting the Trans Mountain expansion pipeline built. I have been the strongest voice around the table and I will continue to be.

The Prime Minister has stated often, as well as the Minister of Natural Resources, as well as the Minister of Finance, that we are exploring all options, including indemnification for the—

● (1640)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, you have negotiated behind closed doors. You say it's an open and transparent process, yet you're negotiating behind closed doors. You said both answers on CTV's *Question Period*. I'm asking you point blank what are you personally doing to get this project built? You are the only Albertan. Many of us have our hopes that you're fighting for the project. However, Minister, we have seen zero progress. We have seen you show up to press conferences and simply nod your head, along with whatever minister there is beside you. We have yet to see any progress on this pipeline.

You have eight days until May 31, Minister. What are you doing to get this project built?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I can sense the frustration in the member's voice. Maybe that frustration is reflective of 10 years of inaction by the Harper government.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, there are 6.8% of Edmontonians, in our city that we represent together, who are unemployed, and you think a talking point like that satisfies Edmontonians? I think you're entirely out of touch.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I can tell you that our government is very optimistic about the future of Alberta. In 2017 Albertans created 50,000 jobs and led the country in economic growth. In 2018 Alberta will continue to lead in economic growth because we believe in Albertans. We believe in their ability and their resiliency to build an economy that works for all and—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, on February 13 you had the opportunity to—

The Chair: Mr. Jeneroux, your time has expired.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I have 10 seconds, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You have three seconds, two seconds....

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: On February 13, Minister, you voted against support for the Trans Mountain pipeline. Why?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Jeneroux, I have to cut you off.

I have to move on to Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's for me a pleasure to identify as well as recognize which government was out of touch for the past 10 years, especially when they had the opportunity to do exactly what the member across is actually talking about and never did a darn thing.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Hold on, Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: To clarify the record, the Alberta Clipper was built, Enbridge Southern Lights was built, Kinder Morgan's Anchor Loop was built, and the Keystone pipeline—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ten years of it and thank God it's past us.

Madam Chair, if I may—

Mr. Ron Liepert: Wait until 2019.

Mr. Vance Badawey: —I'll direct a question to the minister.

Minister, thank you for being here this evening to give some reality to this discussion.

You had mentioned the fact of the mitigation and adaptation initiative that you brought forward most recently, with that attaching itself to the many situations some Canadians are finding themselves in. Can you dig a bit deeper in terms of what this means for Canadians, especially those areas that are seeing some of these challenges, and of course, with that, the families that are affected by those same challenges?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Thank you so much for that question.

One of the reasons why we have created this $2-billion disaster mitigation and adaptation fund is to respond to the real needs of Canadians. As many members may remember, we had severe flooding in Calgary.

The Chair: The minister is trying to answer the questions. Could everybody be polite and just listen?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I would really hope, Madam Chair, that members will listen to what I'm going to say next, particularly those from Calgary, because we are responding to the needs of Calgarians through this disaster mitigation and adaptation fund. We also experienced very severe wildfires in Fort McMurray where 80,000 people were displaced. We're also responding to that through this adaptation fund.

We believe that climate change is having a real impact on our infrastructure and on our communities. We have created this fund to build the resilience of those communities so that they can respond to the impacts of climate change on the infrastructure that they own.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Again, sticking with the theme of reality, if I may, I'll now continue on to the bilateral agreements.

Could you elaborate a bit more on the importance of the bilateral agreements as well as the partnership that's being created with the different provinces and territories, and of course, with those partnerships, the outcomes that we're starting to recognize throughout the country?

● (1645)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, one of the reasons that I ran for federal office—my background is municipal, and I worked at city council for eight years—is that the municipalities need long-term sustainable and predictable funding in order to plan the infrastructure that they have and in order to build and respond to the growing needs in their communities.

Through these bilateral agreements, we are investing $30 billion along with additional funding through gas tax funding as well as disaster mitigation trade and transportation. This additional $30 billion will give them the predictability that they need over the next 10 years to build the infrastructure their communities need in the area of public transportation, so that they can reduce commute time for their residents, build waste-water systems to provide clean water to the communities, or build recreational facilities that they need for healthy living. That's exactly what we're delivering on.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Are you finding, Minister, that this is then becoming an enabler for the different municipalities, therefore alleviating the financial burden placed on property taxpayers?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: It is.

We're also committed to increasing the federal cost share to 40% for certain projects. It could also go up to 50% of the cost share for small communities and 60% of the cost share for communities with a population of less than 5,000.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: It relieves pressure on property taxes.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Aubin, for four minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for attending this meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. The topic I am going to discuss with you involves all three aspects of the committee's name.

In Transport Canada's 2018-2019 departmental plan, the department presents its three core responsibilities: a safe and secure transportation system, a green and innovative transportation system and an efficient transportation system. It seems to me that VIA Rail's proposed infrastructure project, which consists in building a new track solely for transporting passengers on the north shore, specifically addresses these three pillars: transport, infrastructure and communities.

However, I must say that, since the last budget, the people of Trois-Rivières, like those of other municipalities, are concerned and disappointed with the direction in which this route seems to be going. They are left wondering, because the wording always seems to be changing. The Minister of Transport, who was in Trois-Rivières recently, told us that the private sector had to participate in the project in order to get it rolling. At least, that's what the people where I'm from understood.

Does his statement tell us that VIA Rail's proposed high-frequency rail project will be funded by the Canada Infrastructure Bank?

If so, we're not only talking about public funds. The government would also need private funding before taking action, correct?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I can't specifically comment on VIA Rail because Mr. Garneau is responsible for that particular area. I can say that the reason we have created the Canada Infrastructure Bank is to undertake large transport projects that otherwise may never get built. These are projects that are too large for the public sector to undertake or that the private sector will not undertake because of the risk associated with them.

What we want to do is to bring the private sector and the public sector together to explore options to build projects that will connect communities through high-speed rail or a better or more green electrical grid system. Those are the options we want to explore through the bank.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I'll make this even easier for you.

As the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, do you believe that it is appropriate to invest in this type of infrastructure, whether or not its funding is provided in full by the public purse, or by the Bank? Does your government believe in funding this type of infrastructure?

We're talking about Canada's most densely populated corridor. If we do not get this done in this corridor, I really wonder where we will be able to develop a mode of transportation that is essential, innovative, green, and so on.

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Absolutely. I agree with you that these are the kinds of projects we need to build, and infrastructure funding that is available through other funding options, through municipalities, and through provinces is exactly the reason we are investing, or doubling our existing investments. We want to provide that interprovincial or intermunicipal connection between cities, to move people in a way that is more sustainable and more environmentally responsible.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Earlier, I mentioned the 2018-2019 departmental plan. Am I right to celebrate and say that, since the final year is 2019, the 2019 budget will include the announcement we've been waiting for throughout 2018, and that, unfortunately, has yet to be made?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: What I can say is that resources have been allocated to VIA Rail for the expansion, as well as for some of the design work that needs to be done.

Deputy Minister.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kelly Gillis (Deputy Minister, Infrastructure and Communities, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): On the subject of VIA Rail, the funding will have to be allocated to the Department of Transport. As the minister said, this will be discussed with Mr. Garneau.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, I would like to congratulate you. You have probably done more for Albertans in three years than the previous group did in a decade, when you look at all the support, the capital investments, etc.

I want to talk about two areas that will maybe in part take us back to our old days in public transit. As we move toward more accessibility for the disabled, I know many transit systems across Canada are still using the old high-floor buses. They are keeping them on the road after 25 or 30 years, it seems, in some cases.

Will the built environment, buses and otherwise, be supported through funding from your infrastructure fund, or will there be additional funding for this?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: This is a very important question, because we want to make sure our communities are inclusive for everyone, regardless of abilities or disabilities. As part of our long-term agreement with the provinces, we are asking them to adhere to the highest available accessibility standards through the bilateral agreements we have negotiated and the agreements we are signing.

As well, you know that Minister Duncan is working on accessibility legislation that will empower Canadians to demand better from their government when it comes to accessibility in the areas of physical environment, employment opportunities, access to services, and everything that gives them the ability to participate in society.

Infrastructure is very important in enabling accessibility, and the built environment has to be accessible for people with disabilities. It's a requirement we have as part of our funding commitment to provinces.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We will finally get all of that potential realized across our country.

On rapid transit funding, our government has been very generous to metro Vancouver, with two rapid transit lines. There is a third. As the budgets mature, we discover there might not be enough to do all three lines that we really need in such a fast-growing area and such an important area for trade.

Looking ahead, are there mechanisms through which your fund can further assist places like Metro Vancouver to build out their rapid transit system?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Our plan gives the metro Vancouver area sustainable and long-term funding over the next 10 years. They now know how much money they are going to get from the federal government, so they can start their design work on the three LRTs, as well as the Broadway subway or any other projects that might be their priority.

We don't decide which projects to advance because we respect local decision-making, and local councils decide that. We are committed to providing sustainable, predictable, long-term, and significant funding, so the municipalities can undertake those projects to relieve congestion, or provide mobility choices, or deal with the climate change issues that our major urban centres are facing.

● (1655)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Would it be within the power of the province and the municipalities to repurpose or re-profile some of the funding in order to get necessary things done?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: We have made two campaign commitments for metro Vancouver, the Surrey LRT, as well as the Broadway subway. Beyond that, we will look for opportunities to work with the regional mayors' council to explore other options.

The Chair: Mr. Sikand, go ahead.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to reiterate my colleague's point. You've done more for Alberta than the past government has done in 10 years.

Mr. Ron Liepert: All right.

Madam Chair, we either get the opportunity to respond or they stop that—

Mr. Gagan Sikand: I'm being heckled.

The Chair: I'm trying to get back over here. You can respond at that time if you choose.

Mr. Sikand, get on with your questions to the minister, please.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Our previous government clearly didn't believe in climate science and didn't provide funding for it and had actually cut back to it, but—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Come on.

The Chair: He has four minutes.

Continue, please.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: You know what? Climate change is real. At least we believe that here on the Liberal side. You come from a province that has been devastated by wildfires. Obviously you can't control an act of God, but I'm glad that, as minister, you launched the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund recently.

Again, we all do understand that climate change is real. Can you elaborate on how this fund will help communities prevent disasters?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: We, as a government, have committed to investing in green infrastructure. We are investing close to $25 billion to making our communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change. This particular fund, which was introduced last week, will help us provide funding that is necessary for communities like Fort McMurray or communities like Calgary or other communities. We have experienced lots in New Brunswick over the past number of weeks. Those communities need our support. That's exactly why we have created this fund of $2 billion. It's to invest in communities that need our help.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Thank you for your good work and your answer.

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, you have two minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, would like to thank the minister for doing a lot for Quebec, especially with respect to the bridge. I would like to know if it's going to be delivered on time. Do we have a date?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Absolutely. We are working toward December 21, 2018, for the completion of the Champlain Bridge. This is a very important project for the Montreal area. The old bridge is safe now, but it needs replacement. As well, we need to expand the capacity to include the LRT system that is being built in Montreal and will be included as part of the availability of this bridge. I can assure you that we're working towards the completion of this bridge on time.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Stubbs, you have one minute, if you would like to use it.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thank you.

Minister Sohi, since the election of Andrew Scheer as the leader of the Conservatives and the official opposition, we've put forward two motions. One is to ask all members to affirm their support of the Trans Mountain expansion, and the second, my motion, is to ask the Prime Minister to deliver a plan for Canadians about how he would use all tools in the tool box to ensure the Trans Mountain expansion would go ahead by February 15. You and your government voted against this motion.

Why did you vote against supporting Trans Mountain?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I think it's very important to understand we gave approval to this pipeline prior to those motions being introduced, so our commitment has been demonstrated by the approval of this pipeline. We are working diligently to get it done. I think our record speaks for itself. We have given approval to additional pipelines, including the Enbridge Line 3, which is under way, under construction on the Canadian side. The work on the Trans Mountain expansion was proceeding as it should have been proceeding until the new premier from British Columbia, for political reasons, created this uncertainty. The work was proceeding, and now we're working with Kinder Morgan to advance this project because we believe it to be in the best interests of Canada.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I think it's two minutes and 50 seconds, so I'm going to suspend. We'll go in for the vote, and we'll resume the committee for the remaining 10 minutes.

What's the desire of the committee? Do you want to come back after the vote? We'll have probably 10 to 12 minutes left.

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend.

Minister, we'll see you shortly after the vote.

■

_____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for returning, as well as all of the members of the committee.

We'll go back to Ms. Stubbs for two minutes.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Minister, the problem is that your actions don't match up with your words. Of course, the Trans Mountain expansion was approved a year and a half ago, and it faced opponents, delays or blocks, challenges, starting immediately after the approval. It's been a year since the B.C. NDP coalition vowed to use every tool in their tool box to stop it while you voted against using every tool in your tool box to ensure it could go ahead. What exactly will you be doing in the next eight days to ensure that the Trans Mountain expansion can proceed?

● (1715)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: As the member knows, I know she is passionate about Alberta, and I appreciate that. All Albertan MPs care deeply about getting our resources to the international market and expanding a non-U.S. market for Alberta's oil. The Minister of Finance has laid out principles under which discussions are proceeding. One of the areas that we are looking at is the indemnification, the risk, that has been created by the Government of British Columbia on this project. This is a very economically viable project, but due to political risk, it needs certainty and that's exactly what we are working to provide. I can tell the honourable member that we are working very diligently to get this project under way because we believe that this is in the best interest of Canada, getting our resources to the international market, creating jobs for Albertan families, as we have done for other provinces.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: The problem is there are eight days left. Kinder Morgan has said very clearly that you're not in alignment. There is no deal because the problem has never been money. The problem is certainty and the ability to execute your own approval. Your government's and the Prime Minister's total failure of leadership have created the economic and constitutional crisis facing Trans Mountain right now, which is damaging Canada's reputation as a whole.

The reality is that under your government, more energy investment has left Canada than under any other two-year time period in 70 years. On your watch, four major energy projects worth $84 billion have been cancelled. Your government obviously admits and acknowledges there's a problem in oil and gas competitiveness in Canada, because you've launched a $280,000 study to talk about it. What exactly, precisely, will you do, even though you voted against Trans Mountain, to ensure it can go ahead?

The Chair: Please give a short answer to a very long question.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I think Albertans will be served better if we take the partisanship out of this debate. It is very disappointing that we have members of the Conservative Party who are more interested in political gains than the interests of Albertans to get this pipeline built.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sohi.

Mr. Fraser, you have four minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much, Minister, for being here.

I'll start with a question about Trans Mountain then move to a more general theme. One of the things that we're starting, as you know, is the federal government's infrastructure program. We've heard from certain municipal representatives that an allocation-based system can be effective for long-term planning. This is the kind of system that you've implemented for the public transit funding.

One of the challenges for smaller communities that may not have a transit system today, but wish to develop one, is that they feel like they could be potentially left out. Could you give some assurances that these smaller communities that may want to develop a new transit system will have an opportunity to take part in federal infrastructure funding to make that happen?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Thank you for that question. We wanted to focus our infrastructure investments where the needs are the greatest. That's why allocation-based transit funding helps those communities that already have transit systems, but we also created flexibility through our small communities fund as well as gas tax funding, where communities can come together and have a more regional approach to build a transportation system as they see fit.

I take pride in the working relationship that I have been able to establish with mayors across the country. If there are any regional plans that they would like to discuss with us, we're open to having those conversations.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent.

I'm just shifting gears back to what's been the theme of today's meeting. There was talk during the meeting where there was a back and forth going on where it was a bit difficult to understand some of the points you were trying to make. I spent about five years in Calgary. I owe a lot to the city and to the province of Alberta, professionally, including the energy sector. I'm curious if you would like to have the floor for my remaining time to just outline some of the issues that you wanted to cover today but perhaps didn't have the time to, on the issue of support for your home province and the energy sector as well.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: What I can say is that I am a proud Albertan and I work tirelessly on behalf of my province. My department alone, since our taking office, has given approval to more than 150 infrastructure projects with a combined investment of $9 billion for Alberta alone. That $9 billion is more funding given in the last two and a half years than the previous administration gave in their decade in office. I'm very proud of that and very proud that we're advocating on behalf of the energy sector.

I know family, friends, and neighbours who work in this sector, and they have been going through very difficult times for the last number of years. I deeply care about their future and the future of their families. That's why getting the Trans Mountain expansion under way and construction started is not only important for Alberta but also important for the Canadian economy.

Thank you.

● (1720)

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent. Very quickly then, could you give an idea of the rough timeline we could expect for the smart cities challenge's remaining process to roll out.

There is probably only about 35 seconds left, so if you could highlight this for us, that would be great.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: We had 130 applications from across the country, from every province, and we are in the process or short-listing 20 out of those 130. Those short-listed applications will be made public in a short amount of time. Then we will give them seed funding to develop their idea into a proposal, and by the fall of this year we will be announcing some exciting news related to this challenge.

The Chair: Ms. Stubbs.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Minister Sohi, although you voted against supporting a Trans Mountain expansion in the past, I am the sponsor of Bill S-245, the Trans Mountain pipeline project act, which passed the Senate last night and which I will introduce tomorrow.

Will you vote in favour of it?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: As I said earlier, I think the focus of the Conservative opposition on politicizing and creating partisan politics around this project is very unfortunate. It's not helping Alberta families. It is not getting our resources to the international market.

If they were so concerned about the energy sector, there were 26,000 energy sector workers laid off in 2015 under the Harper government, and they failed to give any support to them. I'm proud to say that when we took office, our government immediately extended EI benefits for all laid-off workers in Alberta.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: They don't want EI benefits. They want to get back to work.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: We extended their benefits. Maybe the honourable member doesn't like extension of EI benefits for those struggling families, but we do.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Minister Sohi, Bill S-245 would assert federal jurisdiction over all operations and construction related to Trans Mountain. It's a real tool to enforce federal jurisdiction.

We support your approval of the Trans Mountain expansion in the national interest. We agree wholeheartedly with your emphasis on the jobs it will create and on the necessity to increase pipeline capacity. When your government approved it, we supported that approval and said that approval is one thing and getting it built is another.

In addition to the ongoing negotiations with the proponent, which you won't disclose, will you simply support this legislation that asserts federal jurisdiction over roads, bridges, power connections, the terminal, and the operations and maintenance of the pipeline in order to stop the roadblocks and delays, which are really what is risking the Trans Mountain expansion, in which the Prime Minister has failed?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: The federal jurisdiction and the authority over interprovincial infrastructure projects, such as pipelines, has been established through the courts, and we are very confident that because of that established authority we will be able to get this project under way.

Negotiations cannot happen in the public domain because we want to make sure that we are protecting the public interest, that we are having those discussions in a way that will ensure the best way to move forward on this project. We are not interested in the politics of this. We are not interested in partisanship on it. We are interested in getting this pipeline built because we understand that this is going to help Albertan families and Canadian families.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aubin, you have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to quickly bring up two points.

First, concerning the Champlain Bridge, on March 21, you stated that 65% of the work has been completed. I am far from being an expert on bridge construction, but it looks to me that the completion work may take longer than the large structural work.

Can you still confirm the December 21, 2018, deadline? Is this still an achievable target? If not, why not?

● (1725)

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: That's our goal. We are striving to have this bridge in operation by December 21, 2018, because we understand the importance of this bridge to the community in Montreal and the surrounding communities. We have a very strong working relationship with SSL, and we have been able to work with them to mitigate some of the risk related to this project. We're striving to have the bridge open by December 21.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

Changing topics now, I would like to join in the discussion on pipelines.

It is no secret that we do not necessarily share the same view, but I would like you to explain how I should construe the concept of national interest.

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Since coming into office and forming the government, we have been very clear that economic prosperity and environmental sustainability go hand in hand. That is why a price on pollution is part of that equation. That is why we have a very comprehensive oceans protection plan that invests $1.5 billion into protecting our marine system, as well as the highest safety standards for the pipeline to protect communities from possible leaks. This is part of our comprehensive approach to building and moving toward an economy that allows us to take our resources to the international market, while at the same time, moving us toward more renewable energy sources.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Aubin, but your time is up.

Thank you, Minister.

I will now deal with the disposition of the main estimates.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee will now dispose of the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019, minus the interim estimates the House agreed to on March 22, 2018.

It is votes 1, 5, and 10, under Office of Infrastructure of Canada; vote 1, under The Jacques-Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc.; and vote 1, under the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority.

Do I have unanimous consent to deal with all the votes in one motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

OFFICE OF INFRASTRUCTURE OF CANADA

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....$99,901,528

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....$760,949,312

Vote 10—Contributions.....$3,111,503,619

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 agreed to on division)

THE JACQUES-CARTIER AND CHAMPLAIN BRIDGES INC.

Vote 1—Payments to the corporation.....$250,127,000

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

WINDSOR-DETROIT BRIDGE AUTHORITY

Vote 1—Payments to the Authority.....$195,992,153

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report these votes to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Minister, and your staff, for being here and answering the questions.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Thank you very much.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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